

# OXFORD

## MAGAZINE

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*We respectfully call on the Vice-Chancellor to take the bold and transformative leadership on the climate emergency that she is in such a uniquely favoured position to do.*

B.B., T.J.H

A recent survey of 16-25 year olds, in the medical journal, *The Lancet; Planetary Health*, found that 84% were worried about global heating; other surveys indicate that a significant proportion of university students suffer from “climate anxiety”.

Given the widely agreed facts of the situation, this is an entirely appropriate, even rational, response to the climate emergency; they are the generation that will experience the full impact of the steadily worsening global environmental and social disaster now inevitable, including increasing severity of hurricanes, heatwaves, flash floods, wildfires, desertification and abandonment of major coastal cities due to sea level rise. Immediate human impacts include starvation, refugee movements and deaths from overheating due to the limits of our protective physiological mechanisms through sweating. Excess deaths in Europe during the 2022 heatwave were 70,000. Indonesia is rebuilding a new capital city in anticipation of Jakarta – the world’s second largest city of 11 million – being a third inundated by 2050.

Why then are students not taking mass collective action, exerting the power that they surely have potentially available to them? What is not sufficiently well understood is that the climate trends and consequences are inevitable, even if we stopped carbon emissions completely today, because of lags in many of the scientifically well understood (and therefore predictable) critical changes underway, such as the melting of glaciers, polar ice caps and perma-

## STUDENT ACTIVISM ON CLIMATE

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frost, which takes time but gradually adds to sea rise. But actually emissions are still increasing! At the present rate, by 2030 the target limit of 1.5°C elevation above pre-industrial times internationally committed to in the UN Paris Agreement eight years ago will have been passed, and the current 1.4°C will reach 2.0°C by 2050 (the “net zero” target) on some estimates. Every day that we fail to stop emissions makes

the situation even worse.

The older generation who had the potential over the last decades to reverse these trends will avoid the consequences. What can Oxford students do? Individual actions are no longer sufficient; only collective action on a massive scale can bring about change. Oxford students are in a privileged position due to Oxford’s high standing and influence on policy makers; indeed in consequence they have a certain special responsibility. Imagine what an impact it could potentially make if every student signed a petition voicing their anxieties and undertaking to abstain from voting in next year’s election unless, for example, one of the two main parties commits to a major programme subsidising house insulation and heat pumps paid for by taxing the oil companies; and if they fail to fulfil their promises students would go on strike?

As announced in her Oration at the start of term the Vice-Chancellor is planning to make teaching on climate change available to interested undergraduates.

*“I was reminded recently, ‘science without policy is just science, policy without science is gambling’ ... so working in partnership with our other great institutions here and abroad, I think it’s time for us to show what leadership and partnership looks like on a grand scale to tackle the greatest challenge of our time: climate*

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## INSIDE

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*...and much more*

*change. Frankly, I have come to the view that, if we as a sector don't step up, then I don't know who will. We are trusted, we are not limited by electoral cycles or geopolitics. ... We have the expertise to make impact ... I will be talking much more about this grand mission in the coming year as we develop our next strategic plan for the collegiate University."*

But should such instruction not be a requirement for all, including staff? All that might be necessary to galvanise general involvement – following the remarkable model for mass international engagement and information-sharing initiated by the Oxford Climate Society, and “Talk Climate Change” – is that the word starts to spread, relaying the essential facts as outlined above: then the collectivity may welcome an opportunity to learn more and to debate their options. Rather than just worry, they may convert their concerns into effective action. Would our students not endorse such an all-embracing initiative?

If Oxford students acted in this way on a sufficient scale students across the country and internationally could feel emboldened and inspired to follow their lead. Where politicians have so far avoided their responsibilities in this regard, citizens worldwide need to be properly alerted to the inevitability of the worsening consequences of the climate crisis so that they are in a position to push against current trends and protest at political inaction: what Oxford could start could have a global impact.

T.J.H

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What can be done to educate students – our future professionals, opinion-formers, and leaders -- about the climate emergency? We live in this age of excess information and disinformation, in which it is essential for the public better to understand the science of climate crisis.

In principle and in essence, this is very simple indeed. The effects of climate heating for the general population, even in the UK, are increasingly dire: witness summer heatwaves, excess deaths, and extreme weather phenomena, including, just recently, the terrible floods in Scotland. Further afield, as noted in our *Reminders* section, things are far worse.

But both scientists and pseudoscientists can be guilty of over-complication, because of specialist interests and personal obsessions in the former case, and for nefarious motives in the latter. One could suggest that a lack of scientific thinking in the wider population is a part of the problem, as is more than apparent in the ongoing Covid-19 enquiry. We cannot expect everyone to become an expert – but much more can be desired from our political classes and future leaders. Oxford plays a vital role in shaping these. What can, and what should, a university do?

As reported in *The Guardian*, among other media, the University of Barcelona announced in 2022 that it would introduce a compulsory, credit-bearing course on climate change for all undergraduate students.<sup>1</sup> The announcement came as part of a deal to end a seven-day occupation of the university by a student activist group known as End Fossil.<sup>2</sup> The new course will be devised in part by a team of educators identified by the activists themselves, and will be available from 2024. UB has also committed “to pursuing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals”.<sup>3</sup>

But this example shows some of the difficulties of such measures: colleagues I have contacted at the institution

are unaware of the commitment, or not sure how it will apply in their faculty.

While UB has been perhaps the most headline-grabbing example, the necessity of climate education is felt more widely in universities.<sup>4</sup> Harvard's President, Lawrence Bacow, announced in September 2021, “a major, University-wide initiative to increase Harvard's academic efforts in the areas of climate change and sustainability”<sup>5</sup>. It aims “to create comprehensive University-wide environmental education and real-world climate solutions”.<sup>6</sup>

In the UK a new institution with a dedicated focus on the future of the climate, Black Mountains College, has been founded. It aims to educate students to face the climate emergency.<sup>7</sup> As a charity, run by four full-time lecturers and other part-time staff, its recently opened programme includes a BA in Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology and Systems change.<sup>8</sup>

Cambridge, meanwhile, has launched the Cambridge Zero initiative, “to maximise [its] contribution towards achieving a resilient and sustainable zero-carbon world [...] harnessing the full range and breadth of the Collegiate University's capabilities, both in the UK and globally, to develop solutions that work for our lives, our society and our economy”<sup>9</sup>; the University also launched, in 2020, two new master's programmes, in Anthropocene Studies and Holocene Climates.<sup>10</sup>

At Oxford, the development of a Masters in Environmental Humanities is well underway, and such interdisciplinary programmes are to be welcomed. The V-C has hinted at more ambitious measures in her Oration, mostly around research groups and wider advocacy. But climate education across the curriculum, and increasing awareness of the science of climate change, is still some way off, and will take leadership and resources. Many colleges insist new students attend workshops or training on sexual consent, fire safety, and other topics. Might we envisage cross-curricular education on climate?

The risks of inaction include starting – perhaps perpetuating – a “Two Cultures” era (long after C.P. Snow coined the phrase). Climate is just one of the issues that require an approach from across the disciplines: AI, LG-BTQIA+ rights, the web and social media, drone warfare, space exploration, human genetic modification, and even finance.... The list is long where the majority of the public struggles to judge the merits, dangers or objectives of what scientists are creating; a measure of scientific understanding and reasoning is required. Humanities graduates dominate politics, the civil service, journalism, and other key fields. Oxford could show the way to bring together the “two cultures” for the benefit of future generations.

B.B

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/12/barcelona-students-to-take-mandatory-climate-crisis-module-from-2024>

<sup>2</sup> For further background, see <https://glasgowguardian.co.uk/2023/03/08/students-in-barcelona-to-receive-mandatory-climate-course-following-end-fossil-occupation/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://web.ub.edu/en/the-university>

<sup>4</sup> See also Ben Upton's recent piece in the THES, <https://www.timeshigher-education.com/news/mandatory-climate-courses-gain-popularity-challenges-too>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.harvard.edu/climate-and-sustainability/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2022/09/Harvard-Climate-Edu-Report-Final-v2.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.harvard.edu/in-focus/climate-crisis/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://blackmountainscollege.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/feb/11/new-uk-college-dedicated-climate-crisis-black-mountains>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.zero.cam.ac.uk/our-mission>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/two-new-climate-change-masters-programmes-launched-at-cambridge>

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# My voice needs to be heard

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CHARLOTTE WARGNIEZ

If you are an Oxford Student, you are curious, hard-working and probably spend some time looking ahead as you plan what you want to do next. For nearly 800 years, Oxford has been a place for young minds to project themselves into the future and achieve great things. The Oxonian trend is bound to continue, except students today face an unprecedented challenge: Climate Change.

Climate change is costly and deadly (and the list goes on as science raises more concerns). For students, this is a matter of uncertainty when making life plans questions like these may arise: “Should I bring children into a world grappling with climate change?” and “What will the world look like in 10, 20, 30 years?”. Uncertainty, a constant companion in the human experience, takes on a unique hue in the face of climate change. To the generation that did not cause climate change, and yet is living to see its inevitable performance, fate seems to slip beyond control. This distress and frustration – or Climate Anxiety – is understandable and shared by more than 1 in 3 university students in Britain<sup>1</sup>.

There is a defined generational disparity in the effect of, but also in the potential to affect, climate change. In the traditional system of institutions, there is a steep ladder to climb before earning a voice worth being heard. But climate change cannot wait. If we wait, today’s ongoing emissions will be left tomorrow and the challenges will be even greater. We can let our fate be controlled by today’s leaders and prepare to potentially feel the burden of wrong decisions, or, we can take the lead and have a say in our future.

Climate change is a problem like no other; it is a wicked

problem. Wicked problems are novel and complex, hence require the collective analysis of “climate leaders” able to ask the right questions.<sup>2</sup> This is the perfect opportunity for young voices, Oxford students, and concerned minds to come to the table and provide crucial insights. Wicked problems do not require years of experience or a high social status but require that we ask the right questions and take collective action when traditional solutions aren’t enough. As the urgency of addressing climate change becomes increasingly apparent, it is imperative to bridge the gap between the aspirations of the youth and the often-resistant institutional frameworks. Encouraging collaboration, fostering mentorship programs, and promoting a culture of innovation within institutions can help dismantle the barriers that hinder progress.

The uncertainty may persist, but within the hearts and minds of Oxford’s students lies the potential to turn the tide, to transform uncertainty into a catalyst for meaningful action, and to shape a future that defies the ominous predictions of today. In the face of climate change, the spirit of Oxford persists – curious, hard-working, and undeterred by the formidable challenges of the time.

<sup>1</sup> Phillips, D., J. Crutice, M. Phillips, and J. Perry. “The 35th Report London: Climate Change” *British Social Attitudes*, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Grint, Keith. “Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions: The Role of Leadership.” In *The New Public Leadership Challenge*, edited by Stephen Brookes and Keith Grint, 169–86. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277953\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277953_11).



# Reminders



*The editors are grateful to Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism for permission to republish the blogs below, written by worldwide alumni of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network\*. They highlight the difficulties for, and limits on, journalists in covering the climate emergency. The Oxford Climate Journalism Network is a programme from the Reuters Institute that supports a global community of reporters and editors across beats and platforms to improve the quality, understanding and impact of climate coverage around the world – eds.*

*Climate journalists need persistence to get good data, including from governments*

The greatest challenge is often getting good information, argues Muhammad Daud Khan, a freelance journalist in Pakistan

In April 2022, a sudden change in the weather pattern was observed in Pakistan: temperatures were rising rapidly. Here, summer usually begins in May, but last year, it arrived weeks early. The spring flowers vanished earlier than usual. The government warned that the change in the weather might have direct consequences for wheat, the country's main staple crop.

I began reporting on the impacts of the strange weather on crops for *The News on Sunday*, a prominent weekly magazine, but I quickly encountered a barrier. It took me four weeks to collect the wheat yield data in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province in the country's northwest, where I live. The officials were reluctant to share the numbers.

After finally receiving the data, I began searching for the latest domestic scientific research on how extreme weather events affected crops. But I couldn't get the local scientific research – it didn't exist.

It wasn't the first time I had struggled to get basic climate and weather information from my own government. For Pakistani journalists, simply getting climate change-related data is a herculean task. But climate journalists always need to persist in getting the basic facts, including relying on inside sources, using requests for public data, and relying on farmers who can observe changes in weather patterns.

In the last 10 years, I've seen the underground water table in several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa drop so low that in the Mohmand, Khyber, and Kurram districts wells had dried up, and residents were forced to buy water brought in by tankers.

Now I needed the official figures to back this up. The previous year, Pakistan's Ministry of Water Resources had submitted a report to the Senate's Standing Committee on Climate Change. The report contained some shocking numbers. But when I requested the report, it was declined by officials in the ministry. After coordinating for several weeks, I finally managed to get the report through a source.

## *The impact of the floods*

The difficulty of getting climate and weather data became obvious to the world just months after my story on the wheat yields, with the arrival of the historic 2022 floods. A USAID factsheet has estimated that at least 1,739 people died as a result of the floods, while 33 million people were affected, and millions of houses, livestock, and significant communication infrastructure were destroyed.

The national and international media covered the flood devastation extensively. But due to the lack of data, it was very difficult for reporters and newsroom managers to cover the causes of this devastation, and track how the government acted afterwards. The government damage assessment survey took six months, and still has complications: many of those affected are still waiting for compensation. One year later, we still see a lack of follow-up investigations and long-form stories from the flood-hit areas.

To get access to official data for such stories we have two main options. The first is to rely on sources in the different government departments, and the second is to file a Right to Information request. But getting a reply often takes months. When neither option produces information, we have to rely on international sources for climate data that don't necessarily have the level of detail or local knowledge that we need.

Reporters also struggle to find researchers with local knowledge. Asif Khan, an environmental journalist working for Lakki Broadcasting, says that for a piece on extreme weather events in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, he contacted the Provincial Disaster Management Authority. But the data on the subject was not available. Khan also struggled to find an expert in the local language who could explain the impacts of extreme weather events.

He had no option but to use the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s latest report as his main source. When Khan was covering climate change and its impact on the economy, he had to rely on World Bank reports.

Fawad Ali, a freelance environmental journalist with the Third Pole, says unfortunately one of the reasons it's so difficult to get good climate information from local governments in Pakistan is partly because many officials still don't accept that climate change is a reality.

When he was working on a story on groundwater depletion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the concerned officials were not willing to cooperate. He used his connections and gathered data from different government departments, but found their data contradicted itself, even though it was collected by a single consultant hired by the same government.

These are all major barriers to producing climate journalism in Pakistan. But all of these journalists got the job done. They relied on a mix of local sources, including building a strong bond with farmers who record changes in weather patterns, sources inside governments, and using international data. International collaboration with other journalists and the rise of accessible technology is another major tool: real-time satellite data has given us access to information when the government won't.

Ultimately, the main thing climate journalists need is persistence and creativity. There are many challenges while covering climate change related stories in a country like Pakistan, but you always need to think and work outside of the box.

Muhammad Daud Khan, 11th August 2023

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*To cover climate change well, journalists must be prepared to identify what misinformation looks like*

Climate denial is much less common. But climate "delay" can take many forms, argues Gerhard Maier at ORF

This past February, Daniel Caspary, the chairman of Germany's governing party in the European Parliament, laid out his logic for pushing against a proposed Europe-wide ban on internal combustion vehicles by 2035.

*"We want to and must achieve the climate targets of 1.5 degrees," he said in an interview with Deutschlandfunk, "but we think it would be wrong to back just one horse . . . We assume that the engineers we have in Germany and Europe and around the world are so intelligent that they might develop solutions tomorrow that we don't even know exist today."*

It was a vital lesson in my work as a climate journalist for the Austrian broadcaster ORF. It's important for reporters to know not just what modern climate misinformation and disinformation looks like, but to understand and cover who is behind it, and why.

The reality is that though outright climate denial still happens, it is becoming more rare. More common now is climate "delay": the argument that governments and companies should address climate change later, or claims that the economic cost of addressing climate change is too large. Scientists have disproven both these statements. But combating them is often difficult for journalists.

This is partly because journalists now often need extensive knowledge to debunk greenwashing PR. Caspary's statement sounded innocuous, even sensible. But the reality is that we have clear information that focusing on e-fuels will probably just delay emissions reductions, especially because the wide scale shift to electric vehicles is already underway in Europe.

For one thing, the supplies of e-fuels are expected to still be tiny by 2035, according to an analysis by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. The NGO Transport and Environment, referring to internal investigations within the fuel industry itself, says that the amount of e-fuel in 2035 is expected to only be sufficient for 3% of the demand in Europe. Meanwhile, the emissions of running a car on even pure e-fuels is about 50% higher over the car's life cycle compared to an electric vehicle, according to a study by the NGO.

Germany and Austria are the heart of Europe's traditional auto industry, and there are vested interests in favour of the argument that we should develop e-fuels rather than embracing the shift to electric vehicles. In Austria, the board of the local "E-Fuel Alliance" (as part of the European umbrella organisation as well) is entirely made up of representatives from service station operators, oil and gas companies or the car manufacturer Porsche.

Meanwhile, China is now the global leader for producing electric vehicles, and the share of Chinese vehicles and parts imported into Germany – home of Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, and BMW – jumped by 75% in the first half of 2023, compared to the previous year.

The Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer is aligned with Caspary's resistance to a shift towards e-vehicles, even if the government itself is divided (the climate ministry has supported an EU policy on phasing out combustion engine cars). The country's governing party openly opposes phasing out combustion engines, and Nehammer has described Austria as "THE car country," and calls cars that use e-fuels "grüne Verbrenner", or "green burners".

In another comment, he referred to a "climate doom insanity without scientific proof", implying that climate change didn't pose a significant threat. In March, he also referred to the book "Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Harms Us All" by Michael Shellenberger, a book arguing that concern over climate change is exaggerated.

To understand the potential implications of this misinformation, journalists have to be able to dig into the details. Meanwhile, Austria has set itself the goal of being climate neutral by 2040, ahead of Germany and the rest of the EU. But for the most part, these are just

promises: Austria doesn't have a binding climate protection law in place to fulfil this promise, and even our Federal Environment Agency has found that we will significantly miss this target on our current route. Although the finding was public, it was not easy to find – journalists had to know where to look.

While the calculations inherent in comparing one technology versus another can often be complicated, we now have a lot of definitive information in terms of what options have a material impact on emissions. So at every stage of reporting a "green" solution, journalists should be asking themselves: how much CO2 does this product, technology or company actually save? Who is backing this technology, and why?

And they should always be wary over whether the benefit of a certain climate solution seems to come mainly in terms of positive marketing – or worse, a delay tactic for more meaningful climate policies.

Gerhard Maier, 13th October 2023

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*To help journalists cover rising temperatures, newsrooms need to start with climate literacy*

March 2022 was India's hottest March on record. The heatwave that gripped the subcontinent that month saw some temperatures climb as high as eight degrees Celsius above the seasonal average, and the result was catastrophic. There was a huge death toll, wheat production was disrupted, and incomes were imperilled for farmers across the region.

Around the same time, in April 2022, a group of journalists, editors and fact checkers led by the Google News Initiative and DataLEADS, in partnership with the Science Journalists Association of India, set out to do something unique: design a climate change module to help Indian newsrooms address climate misinformation.

As a trainer for this workshop, the most common questions I heard from staff journalists in the subsequent sessions ranged from requests to explain the limit to a 1.5 degree Celsius rise in temperature enshrined in the Paris Agreement, to requests for local experts who could explain the impacts on the reporters' own cities. Some were also unsure what the 1.5 degree Celsius limit meant—they asked whether the 1.5 degree temperature increase would happen every year.

I came away with a strong conclusion: there is a clear need for climate literacy in newsrooms. Without it, journalists cannot counter climate misinformation and disinformation, or provide good information to our audiences. Worse, without climate literacy, journalists risk spreading misinformation themselves, or promoting supposed "silver bullet" solutions that won't truly address rising emissions or extreme heat.

We also realised that robust climate journalism goes beyond just getting the basic details right. Climate literacy means knowing what dots to connect across science, politics, and business, and avoiding drawing inaccurate conclusions when it comes to climate attribution and scientific accuracy.

The importance of this intersectional approach was never as clear as during the 2022 heatwave. Business journalists embraced the challenge of understanding the impact of the heat wave on the economy. For those reporting on human rights, the heatwave became central to stories on equity, justice and labour; for example, reporters covered how women were impacted by the heat wave, and the decline in productivity as a result. Many health journalists, too, covered the dangerous impacts on our health.

Specialised knowledge of climate change was already becoming increasingly integral to Indian newsrooms, particularly on science desks. Now, we had to put that literacy to work, and move news coverage beyond its traditional silos.

That demand has continued. This year, the heatwave has been nearly as bad as in 2022: high temperatures began in some parts of India in March, earlier than normal, and continued into June in some districts.

Those questions about how to connect the dots also don't entirely go away, even with training. At the beginning of the year, in my then-newsroom Mongabay-India, I set out to report out a particularly interesting urban gardening story with a colleague, Mohit Rao. In the process of shaping the angle for the story, we asked ourselves: how much does urban gardening really contribute to climate mitigation?

We didn't want to over-simplify or over-promise, even if urban gardens did play an important role in cooling cities. But just to answer this simple question, we felt we had to understand the basics of climate change, the evolving science, and the latest policies, so that we didn't craft a misleading story. We ended up highlighting the benefits of urban and peri-urban farming beyond climate mitigation, which is critical for urban planning, including promoting individual and community well-being, increasing urban food security and creating green jobs.

Yet it is a hard reality of our newsrooms that we often don't have the required time to educate ourselves when we need to. We've largely had to learn on the go when the topic of climate change comes up.

Veterans like myself, who encountered the rise of the discussion around climate change in global politics and diplomacy decades ago and now may even lead newsrooms, have a special role to play in laying the groundwork when a newsroom has to deliver under pressure.

All journalists need this strong foundation, but in the coming years, it will be even more pressing for young journalists. They will likely face plenty of online climate misinformation and disinformation, ever more speedily disseminated by new technologies. But most of all, they will be covering climate change while living through its long term impacts, too.

We need to enable journalists to keep pace with climate science and policy, see the bigger picture, and to offer the basic climate literacy training that we know makes such a difference to the quality of our work.

Sahana Ghosh, 8th September 2023

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*Journalists should help audiences understand extreme weather – even when they lack climate data*

Even if attribution studies don't exist, we can still show links between climate change and extreme weather, argues María Mónica Monsalve.

In November 2020, Colombia, my home country, was hit for the first time by a Category 5 hurricane. Iota, as it was named, reached the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, an archipelago to the north of the Colombian coast, where it hit its maximum strength.

The scene that Iota left behind was devastating. And in the aftermath of the chaos one question arose louder than ever: was Iota's strength due to climate change?

Any journalist who relates to this anecdote will know that it is not an easy question to answer. Attribution studies, which seek to use a series of models to see whether extreme weather events have been made more likely by climate change or not, still usually take scientists weeks or months to complete, and much longer to be officially published in scientific papers.

And in countries like Colombia, a country highly vulnerable to

climate change, scientific data is often elusive or might even not exist.

In the portal of World Weather Attribution, an initiative doing an excellent job publishing climate change attribution studies with all the rigour of the scientific method without the time constraints of scientific journals, there are only four publications related to South America. The initiative has not conducted any studies in Colombia, although they have collaborated with Colombian researcher Paola Arias, a professor at the Universidad de Antioquia and a lead author of a chapter in the IPCC Working Group I report.

This leaves Colombian journalists with a problem. How do you answer the "is this disaster related to climate change" question when there is no certainty? My answer: take the opportunity to give a little lesson on the science of climate change attribution.

Simply saying "there is no certainty" – as journalists have done for years – can lead people to be sceptical of climate change. Whereas answering it too simply may mean audiences automatically think there's bound to be no link at all. A lack of certainty could also lead audiences to think that postponing climate action has no consequences.

There are other reasons to be worried. Last year, a group of scientists published a paper in the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction exploring how citizens and leaders explained weather disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean, and if they related them to climate change. They found five different narratives, including one in which citizens believe that climate change is a

*"condition that distracts authorities and people from other immediate daily challenges such as violence, crime, unemployment, food insecurity, and lack of infrastructure."*

Journalists have another option. They can and should take advantage of this uncertainty to explain that, even if scientists don't have an answer to this particular event, they have found a lot of clues on how climate change has altered certain phenomena.

In Hurricane Iota's case, a journalist can explain that climate change has increased the intensity of hurricanes in general, and that it has also slowed them down. In other words, this means that they spend more time in the ocean, gaining strength, and they stall more when they are about to hit the coast.

For Latin American journalists, navigating through this scientific information comes with another barrier: most guides are in English. But the development of Latin American climate journalism has been an important piece of the puzzle: it has created networks of specialised journalists willing to help explain climate science in Spanish.

#### *A recent example*

In September 2022, after Hurricane Ian passed over Cuba and then Florida, many journalists in Latin America received an email from Periodistas por el Planeta, a civil association that wants to enhance climate communication in Spanish and in the region. They sent helpful material about the relationship between climate change and hurricanes. It had been generated by Climate Signals, a project from the US-based nonprofit Climate Nexus, but it was translated into Spanish, including how hurricane intensity had increased since 1979, and the role played by rising sea surface temperatures and ocean heat.

World Weather Attribution, too, offers general guidelines for covering disasters and their climate links – including a guide in Spanish. These resources aren't just introducing a topic, but offer some practical clues on where to start when explaining these nuances to our audiences.

In the case of América Futura, the section I work for at *El País*, that email was also the seed for an article an editor wrote titled: “*Is climate change making hurricanes more powerful? Here’s what science says.*” That piece was among our the most read articles in the following days.

Why? Because after Hurricane Ian, people were asking themselves that exact question. Even with the uncertainty of no official attribution study, we were able to provide them with a smart, scientific answer, and give certainty to actions and audiences about

climate change.

María Mónica Monsalve, 28th July 2023

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*\*<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/how-fix-climate-journalism>*

## How to initiate Congregation actions

### *How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation*

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8<sup>th</sup> day before the meeting.

### *Questions and replies*

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18<sup>th</sup> day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

### *Postal votes*

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present (“on the floor”) at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6<sup>th</sup> day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

### *Flysheets*

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>  
Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.  
The Congregation website is at: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation).  
Advice on Congregation procedures is available from the Council Secretariat on request (email: [congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk)).

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# Our Questions Answered

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HARRIET WATERS

*The editors are grateful to Harriet Waters, Head of Environmental Sustainability, for answering queries we put to her - eds*

*In your University Bulletin blog of 13th November you tell us how much it costs to boil a kettle each day. Can you provide comparable if only approximate figures for leaving your PC or phone open overnight?*

From the reading I have done, these figures are much, much smaller. A recent study in *Which?* looks at a variety of different 'vampire' energy drainers.

The University's IT services assessed the environmental impact of IT use. One of the issues they relate to is the energy consumption associated with the use of various types of equipment.

*You mention the new long term policy of introducing "energy centres" to save University energy bills and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions; what technology is involved here?*

We are still looking into which technologies would work well for the University considering the rapid development in technology, space limitations and existing building fabric.

Unsurprisingly with the multitude of net zero commitments that have been made globally, technology in this space is improving at a rapid rate and so something that was considered positively 24 months ago may now be less favourable, or vice versa. A classic example of this are gas-fired combined heat and power plants which were thought of as being an effective tool to reduce carbon emissions. Now that the expectation is that the UK electricity grid will reach net zero in the next two decades, this technology is much less attractive. Similarly, Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) are improving all the time but still present a challenge in finding space for them, upgrading the fabric of buildings where they are introduced, making sure noise issues are dealt with and adjusting existing heating systems so that the ASHPs work efficiently.

*If you were fairy godmother what single measure would you wish individuals throughout the University to undertake in the cause of sustainability?*

I wish we lived in a world where there was significantly less cars around. We could all still have access to a car when we needed one but it would be through car clubs so that the cars are universally shared and fundamentally reducing the amount of carbon linked with using cars.

Individuals can support the University's environmental sustainability goals by participating in the Green Impact

scheme. Since the University is a large and complex organisation, our Green Impact teams are those that can deliver the change in the departments. They are best positioned to understand the potential and limitation of each part of the University and their work is very valuable to our progress.

On a much lighter note – I'd love more people to be involved in Green Action week in February next year – we held our first week of sustainability events last year and it was a massive success so I'd hope for an even bigger splash next year.

*What about IT?*

We did a review of lots of different actions that could be taken to reduce IT energy consumption in 2015 and worked with IT services on which actions were the most effective and crucially those that were scalable. There have been lots of improvements since then but there is always more work to do. An area of focus in the future will be around using waste heat that is generated by servers to heat our buildings.

*Can we be confident that the highest environmental standards are being applied in all the University's new building (e.g. Begbroke site)?*

We adopted our sustainability design guide in 2017 and it is currently being updated. Initially it was hard to implement on some building projects because of a huge variety of different pressures. The design guide is now much more established and used to complement all our other capital project processes so that we have a final building which is very airtight and uses the minimum amount of energy to run the building. The new version of our design guide will cover the intention to avoid any new gas installation, increase biodiversity as a standard part of all of our projects and the measurement of embedded carbon on a project.

In the past year, the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee agreed on a policy (is it a policy) that in the future, refurbishment of buildings will be favoured against demolition and rebuilding.

The environmental sustainability building standards of our buildings are beyond those required by legislation.

*Are all University vehicles now or soon to be electric?*

Not yet but it is increasingly the case that electric vehicles are the preferred option across the University. In order to achieve our net zero carbon by 2035 goal, there is support for departments moving to electric vehicles available through the Green Travel Fund.



*Does the University have a view on transport planning in the longer term in Oxford City; is the aim to rely on public transport and could this ultimately be cost-free to University staff?*

The University supports a focus on modal shift away from single occupancy car use. We think there should be better provisions for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. Our agile working approach supports this goal as well.

We also take an active part in the Vision Zero initiative to promote road safety and support our staff and students in using sustainable means of commute.

*What kind of sums are we talking about to be able to take the University to be truly net zero carbon?*

We did some financial modelling for the Environmental Sustainability Strategy which identified a cost of £200m for decarbonisation of the estate. Of course, as it is with all financial models, they just reflect our best estimate at the time. As much of the technology we are working with is novel, pricing is quite difficult. What the team focus on is breaking down the decarbonisation beast into digestible chunks so that we can progress to a position of net zero carbon as fast as possible.

We won't be able to do everything all at once so we work on understanding the best way to phase the work.

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## Speaking of Climate Change

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SARAH WATKINSON

I thank co-editor Tim Horder for inviting me to write 'on how I combine my different interests – academic, poet, novelist, environmentalist'. Presumptuously, I had included *The Oxford Magazine* in my list of media to proposition for a review of my new book, *Native Soil*, 'a rural romance with science at its core'. The emeritus research fellow in fungal biology peddling romantic fiction – what was I thinking? I am grateful for this opportunity to explain how and why I have taken my work in such apparently disparate directions.

Since studying under Dennis Garrett in 1960s Cambridge<sup>1</sup>, my driving academic interest has always been to understand as far as possible the processes that go on at the physical interface between inorganic soil and the living cells of soil microbes. These tiny organisms, invisible to the naked eye, must deal directly with their unpredictable environment – unlike our own cells and those of plants, which are sheltered within the constant environment of organised multicellular tissues.

It has been thrilling to collaborate with experts in Oxford and elsewhere, on forest ecology and molecular microbiology (Nick Brown and David Bass), whole-genome sequencing (Daniel Eastwood), and live cell imaging (Mark Fricker, Monika Tlalka). I've travelled world-wide to uncover the ways in which fungi rot down whole fallen trees and return their components to the earth and air. The invisible wildlife of the soil remains largely uncatalogued, though it supports human farming and forestry, and indeed all plant productivity and diversity in terrestrial ecosystems. During a long career at Oxford University, I taught mycology in all three years of the Final Honours School of Pure and Applied Biology and co-authored three editions of the graduate textbook, *The Fungi*<sup>2</sup>, initiated by Michael Carlile in 1992 and with the latest, third edition in 2015.

With the freedom of a pensioned retirement, I was able to backtrack to the road I had decided against at fifteen, when I chose science and not the arts A levels my teach-

ers recommended. I decided to try and write creatively; maybe a campus novel in the footsteps of Kingsley Amis or David Lodge? I applied to read for the Diploma in Creative Writing at the Department of Continuing Education; not the more literary MSc. As a late starter I aspired to become an effective practitioner rather than a Booker Prize contender. I was delighted to be accepted into the course and, through the tuition of poet Jenny Lewis, I rediscovered a childhood gift for writing poetry. She taught the rules of the different poetic forms, something I had longed to understand. Every week, she introduced a new form, with examples of its poetic possibilities; prep was to apply it in one's own poem, starting with the Petrarchan sonnet.

As a scientist schooled to write objectively, ignoring personal feelings, how could I achieve a love poem as Petrarch had so prolifically done for his beloved, Laura? I flicked through *Current Biology* for ideas and came upon Dacke et al.<sup>3</sup> Dung beetles use the Milky Way for orientation – how wonderful! It took me some time after reading the paper to decide on first person and express the creature's own wonder at the beauty and convenience of the world to which it is so remarkably adapted. Would I not believe in a benign creator when, 'every blessed night, miraculously/precipitates new turds for me to find'? It was past 4am when the closing couplet clicked into place. Jenny had distributed a flyer for a poetry competition judged by George Szirtes. I entered my dung beetle sonnet, and was highly commended.

This success became my passport into the delightful community of poetry writers and little magazines, real-life and online workshops, most important to me being Jo Bell's private Facebook group, 52. Jo curated a programme of weekly prompts over one year, with classic examples and weekly critique between members under her watchful moderator's eye; this gave me the habit of poetry writing, and a new tribe: poetry writers and the welcoming world of poets and small magazines, competitions, and residential courses run by the Arvon Foundation. In

2017 I became a published poet when my pamphlet *Dung Beetles Navigate by Starlight* won publication by Cinnamon Press. A debut collection, *Photovoltaic*, followed, from Graft Press. This was largely inspired by work with researchers in Wytham Woods.

My poetry tutor Jenny Lewis and I, with generous support from St Hilda's College, founded an annual science-poetry conference, SciPo, 'to explore the creative common ground between science and poetry'. Following two successful conferences, SciPo won four years' additional funding from TORCH, The Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities as the 'SciPo New Network'. This gave SciPo a stable online presence, and also enabled us to add a prize poetry competition for schools, and a seminar series on science poetry. In 2019, we ran writing workshops at the Botanic Garden, the University Museum and Wytham Woods in connection with the SciPo conference on Plants, Brain and Imagination<sup>4</sup>. Three anthologies of climate change related poetry were collected and published by Elsa Hammond, St Hilda's lecturer in Romanics.

I had been a researcher in the Wytham Woods, and was delighted to return in a new capacity as a poet, to be inaugural Writer in Residence. My first job was to write and recite a poem in the Sheldonian Theatre celebrating the University's Sustainability programme. This was published with others in this magazine; further commissions proved an excellent spur to writing. During my residency at Wytham, I arranged for researchers in the woods to demonstrate and talk about their work to interested members of the public at their woodland research sites, followed by lunch at the refurbished chalet in the woods and a poetry workshop. These meetings were all oversubscribed, and generated some excellent poetry, demonstrating an unmet public demand for active engagement with nature-based research. Collaboration with poet Romola Parish produced the first Wytham Woods anthology, *The Woods of Hazel*.

A further science-based TORCH network, led by Anya Gleizer and combining Art, Biodiversity and Climate ('the ABC network') inspired me to engage specifically with the climate change research directed by Yadvinder Malhi. Anya connected me with Yadvinder's forest restoration post-doc Trisha Gopalakrishna and artist Neeli Malik, then of the Ruskin School; our joint exhibit for COP26 was shown in Paris and Oxford Museum of Natural

History. This link led to continued connection as guest at meetings of the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery, and with other groups connected to ONE, the Oxford Networks for the Environment.

The last decade has seen Public Engagement with Research (PER) emerge as key to countering disinformation and spurring political action on the climate crisis. Creative writing – poetry and storytelling – has a part to play, as vividly exemplified by Steve Ely, poet and Ted Hughes Scholar, in his epic poem *The European Eel*<sup>5</sup>, and in the essay about its genesis on his publisher's blog, *Body of Dark*, Ely's plea for poetry that is 'scientifically credible in the age of mass extinction'. I am grateful to him for helping me bring together my full poetry collection *Photovoltaic*.

Now, with the publication of my new, scientific romantic novel, I am hoping that plot driven romantic fiction, with its appeal to a wider demographic – SciRo following SciPo – may also play a part in engaging a wider voting public with climate change mitigation and nature conservation. *Native Soil* is not science fiction, but a compelling plot-driven tale in which a rich, vulnerable young widow, rebuilding her life alone as a local regenerative farmer, meets a soil scientist with a global mission<sup>6</sup>.

I am delighted that readers find it both engaging and painlessly informative. It is available online at Amazon and from all good bookshops, in time for the winter holidays.

<sup>1</sup> Garrett, S. D. (1963) *Soil Fungi and Soil Fertility*. Cambridge University Press

<sup>2</sup> Watkinson, S. C., Boddy, L., & Money, N. (2015). *The Fungi*. Academic Press

<sup>3</sup> Dacke, M., Baird, E., Byrne, M., Scholtz, C. H., & Warrant, E. J. (2013). Dung beetles use the Milky Way for orientation. *Current Biology*, 23(4), 298-300.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/scipo-2019-plants-brain-and-the-imagination-0>

<sup>5</sup> Steve Ely (2022) *The European Eel*. Longbarrow Press

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Watkinson (2023), *Native Soil*. Moore & Weinberg

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## and you say she's gone for good

*(for Jane Kenyon)*

the cyclone  
took your home and your  
wits last monsoon but  
that's not true – you  
were done after that  
when she deserted you  
on the patio overlooking  
the avenue of poplars, tall,  
spindly against the sky,  
where you first touched  
her lips with yours  
and felt their tenderness

I follow you to  
your hearth that glows  
with butt-ends of cigarettes,  
the potato peels you dump in  
there every evening, and  
the writing paper  
turned to balls of crepe

she said she loved you  
or didn't she? but you  
did and that's all that  
matters now when the only  
sign of her is your face,  
her wardrobe,  
her scented handkerchief  
(it was scented), and  
that half-drunk tea-cup  
on the dining table

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## isle of wight & green onyxes

... jadeite, jasper,  
amethyst, choral, lapis lazuli,  
opal, opalite, sea-carved with careless  
precision into angels, angelfish, angelus,  
it's an island of colour, colourful  
bounty, contour, conformity, churches  
washed by coastlines, quartz, agate,  
paraiba tourmaline, perpetual skies

pulsing, pulsate, petalite, breathing  
that bit more, breathing amazonite, and  
the farther I draw the closer it grows,  
growing out of the unhurry, its citrine  
pools of sunwork, of waterways, shoals,  
pike, perch, plaice, plankton, jellyfish,  
feather-fungi, as though all this were  
all there was to it all, and the gulls here,  
rose quartz and mother-of-pearl,  
unmanned, loping the airways, feeding  
on shrimp, on weeds, tangled, turquoise,  
sea-fires fronting ferries  
farther and farther into firmaments of  
blue sapphire, tanzanite oblivion, all

weekend I've been here,  
driving from coast to coast in search  
of fun and phenomena – lain low, in  
hiding almost, waiting, afraid to stir,  
be stirred, rippled to possibilities, my  
ocean harp, my wrist, my palm, the crook  
of one lone finger, svelte, so svelte, so  
supple, birthing waves, birthing auroras,  
pale peridot, sometimes chrysolite,  
sometimes sunshine sluicing coasts  
of chrysocolla, apatite, granite,  
nambulite, as though sandstoned and  
washed off meaning and memory to  
sapper greens, limes, lemonade, and

this time I left you behind when I  
came, sepia, serpentine, shunted behind  
bookcases, writing desks, discs, time-  
machines, I deleted all texts from my  
mobile, I kept the emails, the notes,  
notebooks in word, threadbare, lapped  
in, lap-topped, hidden in a folder I've  
named 'unnamed' and shelved

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# laws of conservation

I've been in mourning forever,  
grieving I'm told has a shelf  
  
life, so does love, it decomposes  
into something slighter,  
  
something more human, the vestige  
of loss taking different shapes  
  
and forms with time, turning to  
peat, soiling the palms for their  
  
indiscriminate scooping and handling  
of it all so you can't tell one from the  
  
other, it's a process, this, of fertilising  
angst until you're done, vaporised  
  
to fumes; our physics professor once told  
us matter is never destroyed, grief is  
  
matter, it's much the same, I'm much  
the same, I'm sat suspended mid-air in  
  
the spaces somewhere between longing  
and despair, their odours obdurate,  
  
coiling about my person when I move  
or lay myself down on the edge  
  
of a day, it's an act of pointless  
ablution, this forgetting and forgoing  
  
because it's not water that must do  
the trick of washing and waking here  
  
but what remains of time and of me in  
my constant cleansing of my crests  
  
and contours, my neck, chest, midriff  
down to my ankles that are rankling  
  
still in bits and bobs of memory and  
memorabilia that I sift, stubborn like  
  
soot, like sorrow, hung in threads  
and filaments and what was once  
  
organic, in its purest form of anguish,  
now maps marked in lines and  
  
lineaments living inside me

RUPAM BAONI

Rupam Baoni is a writer and artist based in London, whose work ranges from poetry, fiction, essays to watercolour, oils, acrylics and sculpture. Her most recent poetry collection is *'chronicles of entering my body'* (Hypatia Publications 2021). Her work has been shortlisted/longlisted in the Queen Mary Wasafiri Prize 2020, 4th Estate, Commonwealth Prizes among others.

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# Notes from Ivory Flats

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ROBERT FOLEY

*We're all doomed .... or are we?*

Responses to *Notes from Ivory Flats* – when they happen – often take the form of – “yes, that’s exactly what it’s like”, which is an excellent gateway to a joint moan about the current state of British universities. These conversations often end with a question – “But what can we do about it?”.

This is my last *Notes from Ivory Flats* – the temptation for older academics to go on and on to the point of repetition is enormous, but I am resisting, hopefully not too late – and so I thought I would end by addressing that question. It is all very well diagnosing the problem, but we would be pretty disappointed with a doctor who then said “Well, you’re sick, but I’ve really no idea what to do.... Good luck!”

I don’t have much of an idea, and certainly no silver bullets, but I think there are strategies of survival that can bring a bit more control, perhaps even joy, to our working lives.

I will start by introducing a new classification of academics – ‘institution burrowers’ and ‘institution surfers’. Burrowers – more positively called institution builders – are those who see their universities (or more locally their departments) as integral to their work and that investment in their activities and development – sometimes known as improvement – are mutually beneficial. They are prepared to burrow into the depths of their institutions to affect how they work. As an inveterate institution burrower myself, there is great satisfaction in developing new courses and new course structures, building research groups and centres, organising seminars, and having a say in the running of our place of work. It is well-known that one of the main drivers of job satisfaction lies in having a sense of control. There is also the ability to influence the direction of travel, although in my case, I felt I was often the buffers over which the runaway train ran. I think above all, though, the pleasure of being a burrower lies in the interactions with colleagues, other academics, administrators, and students who felt they were part of a shared journey.

Surfers are those who see their institution as, at best, a useful vehicle for their own career, and at worst an address of convenience. Many are self-identified superstars. Surfers glide along the surface of the institution, barely getting a foot wet in the sea of work that running the institution involves. Some are perennially at conferences, but most are just experts at keeping their heads down when volunteers are sought or duties are assigned. Some have learned incompetence, while others are simply ‘too busy’. The true experts are those who take on the duties and then manage to delegate them to others.

It is a sad fact that surfers are often promoted ahead of burrowers, as they do find time to write grants and publish prolifically. And much of what I have written about in these notes could certainly imply that we should all be surfers now. As managerialism takes over, why burrow

when the administration can do it for you, leaving you to surf to your hearts content? And that might be one answer to my question – what can be done? Let it go. In the downward spiral that many of us see in British university life, being a burrower is a bit of a dead-end niche.

But I think this is a mistake, and in fact many of the colleagues I have known over the years remain committed to investing in their institution. Despite my criticisms, university life remains broadly pleasurable, and despite the growing tensions, we want to make it better. If we want to preserve what is good, we must be involved. This is not a case of using our badger-like claws to hold up change, but to shape it, through both resistance and initiative.

So, as an optimist, the question for me is how, not if. Before making some suggestions, I would stress a caveat. The symbiotic bond between university and individual academics has morphed from strong mutualism to a more unbalanced one. This is not a reason for not investing and burrowing, but for being aware of the limits, to not be naïve in believing that one’s efforts are appreciated, and to set firm boundaries where one does not lose sight of one’s own teaching and research interests and work-life balance. Too many people are like the Marlon Brando character in *On the Waterfront* – “I could have been a contender”. They could have submitted that grant, they could have published those results first, but they didn’t have time due the commitments on the graduate appeals committee, the space allocation working party, their pastoral activities....

University life is a trade-off, and one should always keep an eye on where one’s own interests lie in that trade-off, between investment and commitment to one’s institution, ultimately the basis for our success and working happiness, and personal achievement in our fields of research. Managers may have a different view on that trade-off.

So now we are really prepared to ask – what should one do? First, one must know how the system works. This used to be a case of reading big books full of ordinances and regulations, and talking to people (secretaries were particularly good here). University mechanics are much more fluid and opaque now, with information buried in websites, emails, Teams, and the ether generally. Directives and changes also come down at a much greater speed, so just keeping up is a daunting task – “Ah yes, that was last year’s risk assessment form, this year’s has been completely changed ....” Indeed keeping up is probably a task that is incompatible with doing much else or with one’s sanity. But it is worth a try, as only by knowing what is going on can one hope to have an effect. Too often, by the time you have discovered that all lectures will be automatically recorded and captioned by a bot, it is too late to stop such madness.

Knowing what is going on is, however, only half the battle. Most universities, and especially Oxford and Cambridge, operate through a committee system. There are formally composed committees, such as Faculty Boards

or School Councils (or other such appropriately named), and traditionally decisions and accountability lies with them. Old hands knew how to burrow through minutes to find out exactly what decision had been formally made, and can distinguish between those and just statements of intent or hope. This is phenomenally dull, and has more than a whiff of antiquarianism. However, it meant that there was a level of transparency and accountability. Increasingly though, such formal committees are bypassed and supplanted by *ad hoc* ones, such as ‘executive committees’, ‘management teams’, even ‘senior management teams’, and by administrative division directors, assistant directors, deputy assistant directors (or do I mean assistant deputy directors?). This makes searching for the locus of decision-making like searching for the yeti.

An impossible task, and giving up is the obvious option. But I think there is a short-cut, and that is just to ask – ‘where is this proposal/decision/directive coming from?’. In effect, this is searching for the elusive ‘they’ or even the more apparently authoritative ‘the University’. “Who are ‘they’?” should be tattooed on the hands of every lecturer and professor.

There is also another way. *Notes from Ivory Flats* could be criticised – surely not! – for ‘othering’ administrators and managers, and in doing so not giving respect to people who are working hard and are committed to their goals. And I’m sure it works the other way too. For years, I worked with a technician who would invariably leave a room with a *sotto voce* ‘bloody academics’, and I am sure that anthem can be heard in central administrations all over the world. The important thing, though, is to get to know the people you work with, even if they are remote.

Covid has made personal contact optional and minimal, and that can only create misunderstandings. Both sides – and I am doing it again by calling it both sides – need to get out there and mingle, not just on a once a year garden party, but day to day contact. Bring back the phone, and bring back the dropping in. Bring back the gossip, the light-hearted chats about nothing much, for these become the building blocks of trust. Bring back proximity of offices. Make friends. There is much to be learnt and gained. Shared relationships bring shared understanding. We are a social species, not a digital one – or at least, not yet!

Making friends can be put more pragmatically – make networks of people you know across all levels. Covid and

centralisation have limited personal networks. It used to be the case that it was relatively easy to have a network of people you knew across many parts of the university system, across many ages. It is my sense that this is harder now, and the networks are smaller and overlap less. This is partly a result of the growth of hierarchies and lines of management, but it is worth making the effort to cut across these, and with this will come shared information, shared interests, and a greater sense of empowerment and influence, no matter where you lie in the system. This, of course, takes energy, initiative, and overcoming that awful sense of shyness that is an integral part of any British institution.

I think ignorance of what is going on lies at the root of many problems – any economist will tell you of the dangers of incomplete information. The multiple types of silos that now exist in university life only enhance the lack of shared knowledge. This is compounded by the sense that you are the only one thinking some heretical thought. This is the foundation of groupthink, and, as I discussed in the last *Notes from Ivory Flats*, acquiescence. Fear of being a lone voice based on ignorance of what others think and how the system works is a powerful force. What is surprising is how often, when one does speak up, others will come up to you afterwards and say ‘that’s exactly what I was thinking’. Having networks that you have built provides you with the armour to say what you think, and to challenge authority, and so become an effective burrower rather than one who gets buried as the tunnel collapses.

But why bother, you might well ask? Why not just surf and get a better suntan? Bizarrely, I would turn here to the military. When soldiers have done something of enormous bravery, and won a great medal, they are asked if they did it for King and Country in a fervour of patriotic enthusiasm. Invariably the reply is, no, of course not, “I did it for my mates.” And we should do it for our mates, be they students, colleagues, collaborators, early career researchers, even competitors as we need them too, and especially for those coming after us. There may never have been a golden age of universities and academic life, for each generation faced challenges and conflicts, but there is little doubt that there was much that was of value in the freer and more democratic academic world that my generation benefited from, and preserving and restoring that is worth a bit of burrowing.

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# Casualised Tutorial Teaching: some data at last

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T. F. COOMBES

Earlier this term, the Vice-Chancellor and the Conference of Colleges received a report about casualised teaching, which focused on parts of the Collegiate University that do not submit employment data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency.<sup>1</sup> The report was based on a survey conducted by UCU-affiliated academics in Trinity Term 2023. One focus-point concerned employment practices at the Department for Continuing Education – an issue on which the University is moving, perhaps encouraged by well-publicised legal action.<sup>2</sup> My subject here is the report's other focus-point: casualised tutorial teaching, on which there is currently no sign of concerted reform. I wish to present the viewpoint of a poorly understood section of University teaching staff from the personal experience of one of their number.

The report's headline finding provided data that anyone involved in the tutorial system should already know: tutors paid at the standard tuition rate – mainly graduate students, but also departmental lecturers, fixed-term researchers (including many JRFs) and other postdocs – often receive less than the minimum wage once preparation and marking time is factored in. On average, hourly paid College tutors responding to the survey worked a total of at least 3.5 hours for every paid teaching hour.

Those looking to dismiss the report have an obvious option. Once respondents are split into different job types, the sample sizes are small – 77 hourly paid College tutors, for example. Of these, 41 worked in the humanities, reflecting a general bias in respondents' subject-areas. Individual averages for preparation time per contact hour in the sciences (3.2 for Maths, for example, or 5 for Biochemistry) are therefore based only on a handful of responses.

But as the report observes, this is at least *data* – rather than, say, perceptions based on the assumptions of highly experienced academics who have been teaching for decades. Neither the Staff Experience Survey nor the University's current Pay and Conditions Review cover staff delivering tutorials at the standard tuition rate (despite, of course, the fact that they deliver the compulsory teaching component of University undergraduates' courses, something that stuns my colleagues new to Oxford and even longstanding ones less familiar with the University's structure). Hence the *raison d'être* of the UCU survey. But because UCU does not have access to University or College mailing lists, the survey's dissemination relied on chains of personal networks, easily broken in a busy term. This seems the most likely explanation for the relatively low uptake (the same applies to the open letter to the Vice-Chancellor currently circulating).

Casualised supervisors at Cambridge have produced similar data about preparation time, and got much further in discussions with their own Collegiate University.<sup>3</sup> A re-

cent joint statement by the University and Colleges noted that it 'would clearly be unreasonable' to expect PhD students to prepare over three hours for one hour of teaching, and that employers should communicate this fact; tutorials are not for imparting information, but simply discussing students' ideas.<sup>4</sup> Such responses may indicate a disconnection from current undergraduate expectations, certainly in my corner of the humanities. Partly because of the priorities induced in them by secondary education, undergraduates often expect tutorial content to prepare them directly for exams. They politely complain to me, as an Organizing Tutor, about tutors who give feedback in the tutorial rather than before.

Casualised tutors also face pressure from above. The University's Disability Advisory Services (DAS) aptly point out that, for some learning differences, verbal feedback is very hard to process. In a recent departmental talk, a DAS staff member emphasized detailed written feedback as central to inclusive teaching, censuring the traditional – though now near-extinct – humanities practice of students reading out essays in tutorials. This term, for the first time, I have seen undergraduates point to their Student Support Plans to request more written feedback from casualised tutors. On the one hand, then, the Colleges' payment system deeply disincentivizes essay marking: 80% of hourly paid tutors described their experience of marking work within paid time as either 'fairly bad' (27%) or 'very bad' (53%). On the other hand, the University's well-intentioned recommendations raise the possibility of discriminating against disabled students by not giving enough written feedback. College and University systems work together to place casualised tutors in an alarming bind.

All this begs a bigger question: how much of the core, compulsory teaching in our world-leading education system is actually done by junior scholars on the standard tuition rate? An FOI request revealed that graduate students and staff constituted as 'other' by HR gave 34% of supervisions across Cambridge University from 2016-2018.<sup>5</sup> Because of organisational differences, getting the same information from Oxford will be much harder. An HR staff member explained to me how time-consuming it would be just for individual Colleges to gather such evidence from payrolls (hourly paid tutors, as self-employed or casual employees, almost never receive contracts of any kind). But he also said that the number of graduate students whose details are submitted by Organizing Tutors for right-to-work checks for tutorial teaching has soared since the pandemic.<sup>6</sup> Departments may be more able (and willing) to give indications, especially those in the Social Sciences that distribute tutorial teaching to graduates centrally. The UCU report notes one department where, remarkably, the tutorial stints of permanent

joint post-holders covered at most 30% of the total hours required to fulfil the department's own tutorial teaching guidelines in 2021-22. In reality, of course, the tutorial system's reliance on casualised College-only tutors will vary right down to individual subjects at individual Colleges.

\* \* \*

Against a backdrop of horrifying conflict that affects so many University members, and in a month when Oxford Brookes announced the closure of two entire departments, such concerns may not seem pressing. The over-production of doctorates ensures a pipeline of absurdly over-qualified candidates for absurdly underpaid work. The University's recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) award may strengthen any opinion that teaching is not an area in which reform is urgent. But the award just corroborates a basic point of the report: people put a lot of work into teaching, not least enthusiastic junior academics.

The UCU report provides evidence for two further aspects of the tutorial system which many may already suspect. The first is that the deep dissatisfaction of casualised College employees is not communicated to line-managers. 62% of hourly paid College tutors described their experience of being valued by their employer as either 'fairly bad' or 'very bad' – a figure which one hopes would be a surprise to those employers. As ever, unhappy respondents may be over-represented in such surveys. But given the College employment practices that participants reported, complaints were hardly unwarranted. One respondent, for example, was apparently told that delays in dealing with harassment complaints about a Fellow were a consequence of not being a Fellow herself. One College has apparently kept a Stipendiary Lecturer on the lowest spine-point for 14 years – etc.

My peers who did not contribute to the survey all also have their tales about College teaching. The following is mild but typical, and a consequence of the workload generated by the tutorial system. A naïve graduate took up a Stipendiary Lectureship to help pay the final year of his doctorate; despite quickly using up his contracted stint on the agreed courses, he was piled with more and more teaching as the year progressed, including on unfamiliar topics that required considerable preparation; despite his pointing this out multiple times, the Tutorial Fellow insisted he take on the extra teaching; given the Fellow's influence in his field and power as a referee, he felt it unwise to complain from the viewpoint of his career. The impact on his ability to complete his doctorate was significant.

According to the Vice-Chancellor, the University's recent Staff Experience Survey suggested that 'many people feel valued and heard'.<sup>7</sup> To College-only staff, this bore a familiar irony, given that the Survey's very remit excluded large numbers of staff (academic and non-academic) who devote much of their working lives to the care and education of University students. Summaries of those staff-members' comments in the alternative UCU survey reveal how little some also feel heard in the College system. Given the tiny networks and insecure contracts on which College teaching relies, it is almost inevitable that hourly paid tutors and Stipendiary Lecturers will hide concerns from those on whom their careers and livelihoods depend. I would never have entertained writing

this piece if I did not have a relatively secure contract (unlike almost all of my College-only colleagues), as well as a sympathetic line-manager and Senior Tutor at one of my Colleges.

The second thing that many will suspect, but for which the UCU report gives some clear preliminary evidence, is the lack of diversity among College-only academic staff. Stipendiary Lectureships (SLs) were the one job-type whose sample size (55) is perhaps large enough – and the patterns stark enough – to indicate trends at least in the humanities. While the proportion of men and women among the 15 worst paid SLs was roughly equal, 80% of the 15 best paid were men. This corroborates something fairly obvious: when teaching contracts do not allow for maternity leave, women are less likely to stay in roles long enough to move up pay scales, or acquire more stint hours. Since I started my own teaching job, my female peers have, without exception, stayed the least time in similar casualised roles. (I currently only know of female postdoctoral academics in SL roles who have a high-earning partner.) Indeed, I would never have taken up my position had I not felt that, in order to pursue my vocation, I could put off decisions about a family – a privilege largely of my gender.

100% of SLs responding to the survey who identified an ethnicity (80%) identified as white.<sup>8</sup> This sits uncomfortably with Colleges' rhetoric in job advertisements and student-facing material about diversity and inclusivity. The root of that statistic, if even remotely representative, is surely socio-economic. Respondents commented that SLs contracts select for the most privileged academics, a claim that is difficult to reject given the relation between SLs' low part-time salaries, the time-consuming nature of their duties, and the cost of living. SLs are not considered in financial terms to be academic staff: their pay is restricted to grade 5 of the University salary scale (the University stipulates that academic-related staff are paid at grade 6 or above). Free lunches are not a useful benefit if – as with most of my peers – you cannot afford to live in Oxford. The Collegiate University has made considerable effort attracting more diverse students, but a spanner is materializing in the works. An increase in student numbers, unmatched by increases in permanent staff, produces exponential demand on the tutorial system. That demand seems increasingly to be offloaded onto casualised positions, some of which are so poorly remunerated that only those from affluent backgrounds can subsist in them. While the student body is diversifying, then, the opposite may be happening with the staff members sitting across from those students in their compulsory, most academically intimate teaching situations.

The big question, again, is how reliant the Collegiate University is on SLs. While their numbers will be easier to establish than hourly paid tutors, exactly how much work they shoulder may be less clear. 38% of SL respondents said that they were either contractually or effectively the Organising Tutor in their subject at their College(s). As Tutorial Fellows will agree, that is a lot of hours – and responsibility – to be 'included' in a teaching stint if you do not have a University salary (as most survey respondents did not) or Fellows' benefits. Four years into doing the day-to-day running of a subject at two Colleges, I thought I'd at least ask to be paid for that extremely time-consuming (though also especially enjoyable) aspect of the job. Even I was surprised by the timesheets I made that Trinity Term. Only 13% of the hours I spent on all aspects



of College teaching – i.e. marking, course preparation, most student queries, pastoral meetings, other extra-tutorial meetings, organising all collections and all external teaching (as well as actually teaching) – were chargeable to the stint on which my part-time pay was calculated. The figure was probably exaggerated by the fact that I prepared a new course for a small number of students, but it also did not include admissions work.

\* \* \*

What puzzles many early-career tutors is that updating and streamlining the tutorial system for our irrevocably bureaucratic age stands to benefit everyone. Tutorials can be the most rewarding aspect of any Oxford position, but the administration and marking are also a major part of the workloads under which many senior academics feel increasingly buried (see the Editorial in the previous issue of *Oxford Magazine*). Fellows wistfully recall how productive they were in former jobs without a tutorial stint; promising careers gently expire beneath the organising duties passed onto College Lecturers by Tutorial Fellows and Senior Tutors; most importantly, the DAS's primary message is that students are 'overwhelmed' by their weekly workloads. Put crudely: if this is a bit too much for everyone, why don't we adapt things?

Some may not see it that way. A College Fellow recently told me of a colleague elsewhere whose Senior Tutor told him to invent another course at his department just to make sure he filled his tutorial stint. If true, this is a striking case of putting the bureaucratic cart before the educational horse. Others' examples may help generate progress. In the context of recent campaigns about the supervision system, Cambridge University Council announced that 'the University and the Colleges should collectively seek to address the issue of excessive workloads on both students and staff as a priority'.<sup>9</sup> Given all of the above, it would be remarkable for Oxford's own Pay and Conditions Review not to suggest something similar in the context of the tutorial system. But as the UCU report observes, the manner in which the website for the University's Review has dismissed College-only staff from its remit is not promising.

The UCU report's individual sections propose pay rises for casualised tutors to cover their required but effectively unpaid duties. Crucially, the report also cites recent doc-

umentation from one of the least rich Colleges, which proposes firstly that hourly paid tutors teaching a 'whole paper' will be employed as SLs (a dramatic pay rise); secondly, that Non-Stipendiary Lecturers whose teaching 'equates to an SL stint should be offered SL contracts'; and finally, that SLs with a teaching stint of 5 or 6 hours receive an additional stint hour to 'keep up with research' (those on higher stints receiving more). That a poor College is leading on such reform rather mutes the inter-Collegiate refrain that the richest Colleges cannot raise the pay rates because poorer ones would bankrupt themselves keeping up with the competition. Regardless, my own sense is that administrative efforts at departmental level – establishing how much curricula depend on casualised labour, rethinking how they are most efficiently realised at the College level, and helping casualised staff directly with tutorial content – could go a long way.

<sup>1</sup> I write here in an individual capacity, as an early-career tutor responding to the report's overall content.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jan/23/academics-sue-oxford-university-teaching-contracts-gig-economy-lecturers>.

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of recent campaigns, *Oxford Magazine*, No. 457, 2nd Week, MT 2023.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cam.ac.uk/notices/news/an-update-from-the-university-and-colleges-on-the-justice4collegesupervisors-campaign>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ucu.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Hourly-Paid-Workers-at-Cambridge-University.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Colleges are obliged to check the right-to-work status of graduate students employed as tutors; the numbers submitted for these checks give a crude indication of how much teaching is undertaken by graduates.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2023-10-03-vice-chancellors-oration-2023>.

<sup>8</sup> Of the 20% who chose not to identify an ethnicity, over half were male and over 35.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cam.ac.uk/notices/news/an-update-from-the-university-and-colleges-on-the-justice4collegesupervisors-campaign>

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# Who's in charge?

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G.R. EVANS

Is the governing body of the University of Oxford Congregation or its Council? Oxford's Statutes never clarify that, though they certainly make clear the subordinate position of its Council, which is 'bound by all resolutions passed by Congregation and all other acts done or decisions taken by Congregation in accordance with the statutes and regulations' (Statute VI). By contrast Cambridge's Statutes expressly state that 'the Regent House shall be the governing body of the University', relegating its Council to a later Chapter, where it may 'advise' and 'report to' the Regent House.

Only Oxford and Cambridge have to determine whether bodies constitutionally higher than their Councils are or are not their 'governing bodies'. For other universities their governing bodies are defined for them in the *Further and Higher Education Act* of 1992 s.71 and Schedule 6,<sup>1</sup> which set requirements about the make-up of a governing body. These requirements are still in force, though 'alternative providers' have been created since. The model set by the Act of 1992 has force for higher education corporations under the UK Corporate Governance Code. This embodies the principles that there is a Chair who 'leads the board and is responsible for its overall effectiveness in directing the company', who 'facilitates constructive board relations' and that the Board 'should include an appropriate combination of executive and non-executive' directors with 'a clear division of responsibilities between the leadership of the board and the executive leadership of the company's business'.<sup>2</sup> Oxford and Cambridge are both civil corporations, to which this applies in principle.

While both Oxford and Cambridge have extensive 'memberships',<sup>3</sup> and the chartered universities commonly treat at least their graduates as 'members', forming a Senate which reports to their governing-body Councils, in the case of the post-1992 universities the members of their governing bodies are their only 'members'. They constitute the university as a 'corporation'. There must be an external Chair and between 12 and 24 members, with a majority of 'independent members' external to the university. Only 'up to two' members may be 'teachers at the institution' and up to two its student members. Congregation and the Regent House have no Chairs, but their Councils do. In Oxford the Vice-Chancellor 'normally' takes the Chair.<sup>4</sup> In Cambridge the Chancellor's right to chair if present is respected but there too it is normally the responsibility of the Vice-Chancellor.<sup>5</sup>

The conduct of affairs in other universities is very different because, although the Vice-Chancellor may choose to be a member or not, meetings of their governing bodies are chaired by an outsider. The working relationship between a Chair and a Vice-Chancellor can prove challenging. The Leadership Foundation<sup>6</sup> published guidance in 2017 on *Managing the Chair/Vice-Chancellor Relationship*, noting that one may have been involved in appointing the other: 'A good relationship at the top is important,

but there is a risk if chairs and vice-chancellors get too close',<sup>7</sup> it says, but it assumes a good deal of contact and discussion between the two, hoping for a basis of 'critical friendship'.

In the running of universities other than Oxford and Cambridge their 'University Chairs' represent an additional constitutional factor, considering themselves to be in charge of their institutions. 'We all have some general interest in higher education, or we would not be around the table', wrote Martin Williams, the 'Chair of the University of Cumbria', in a recent *Blog* for the Higher Education Policy Institute. 'Like most Chairs I don't spend much time bothering about national policy; we get on with overseeing our institutions', he said, and 'as Boards, we must take the necessary decisions to keep our institutions in reasonable financial health, and handle the consequences – for our courses, our students, our staff'.<sup>8</sup>

AdvanceHE sets out its own view of the role of a University's Chair as:

*'making best use of the knowledge, skills and expertise available from amongst the membership of the governing body rests with the Chair of the governing body. A key aspect of the Chair's role is to ensure the knowledge, skills and expertise represented on the governing body are effectively utilised. In this regard the Chair should encourage all members to contribute fully to the discussions and decisions of the governing body.'*

The question arises as to how much detail an external Chair of a university is likely to know about all the dimensions of university affairs, let alone other governing body members. The Board will meet perhaps half a dozen times a year, with most of its members external and not expected to be in regular touch with the university's daily life in the way that members of Congregation and the Regent House will be.

Both Oxford and Cambridge have slowly and reluctantly added a few external members to their Councils, currently five for Oxford, four for Cambridge. External members usually bring with them a considerable knowledge of other worlds, clearly visible in their published declarations of interests.<sup>9</sup> But in Oxford and Cambridge they are a small proportion of bodies whose *ex officio* and elected members bring with them extensive knowledge of the University. The difficulty faced in other universities' (with the exception of Cambridge) is that the governing body is required to be made up preponderantly of outsiders, who are likely to have limited opportunity to get to know their institution from outside.

In a *Response* to a HEPI Debate Paper 33,<sup>10</sup> John Rushforth of AdvanceHE 'offers some reflections', beginning by emphasising that UK universities 'recognise' the importance of being 'fair, transparent and accountable'.<sup>11</sup> They and most of the 'sector bodies' are.

\* \* \*

The Chairs of Universities began to form a club in 1986, first as the Committee of Chairmen of University Councils (CCUC). As the FHEA 1992 came into force a Standing Committee of New University Chairmen was formed, but that soon merged with the CCUC to form the Committee of Chairmen of University Councils and Boards (CCUCaB) (1993). The committee changed its name in 1996 to the Committee of University Chairmen (CUC) and again to become the present Committee of University Chairs (still 'CUC'). The CUC's then Chair, Michael Queen, Chair of the University of Surrey, published a "Message" in October 2022. He said it had been 'a privilege to work with and get to know Chairs of Councils, Courts, and Boards that govern our great Universities. Without exception, these are people who together with their Councils give their time freely in support of Universities across the United Kingdom'.<sup>12</sup>

In 2000 the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), formed in 1930 as another club, became Universities UK (UUK), thus arrogating to its members the assumption that it was they rather than their Chairs who 'were' their universities. Oxford and Cambridge have Vice-Chancellors and with them a right to membership of UUK, but lacking Chairs they cannot belong to the CUC.

Of the two it is the UUK which now appears in headlines rather than the CUC. It describes itself as the 'collective voice' of the 142 universities of the UK and is responsible for a good number of publications. It says it aims 'to be open and transparent about how we are run' and anyone may subscribe to its *Newsletter*.<sup>13</sup> Regarding transparency the predecessor of the Office for Students, HEFCE, used to open its Annual Meetings to anyone interested and openly published a wide range of resources. The Office for Students holds open meetings and publishes Minutes and other information about its doings. AdvanceHE, in which a number of former sector bodies were merged in 2018, is also open about its activities.

The CUC is more secretive, but promises its members 'exclusive' access to 'a range of publications, videos, articles, opinion pieces, and other materials' to support them as 'HE leaders' and help them 'navigate the fast-changing environment and legislative and regulatory landscape which surrounds HE policy and practice'.

Do Oxford and Cambridge suffer any disadvantage from not being members? The CUC's members, but only its members, 'benefit from a wealth of information on national and international HE governance issues and policy; regular networking and career development opportunities; and a forum to share concerns with colleagues in a secure environment'. Top tips' are available only to CUC members.<sup>14</sup> Its current *Autumn Newsletter* may be read only by its members.<sup>15</sup>

The CUC is keen on exchange, but strictly amongst its own members. 'Connecting our members is a pivotal area of our work and we encourage all members to participate in both online and face to face activities, by joining online discussion forums,<sup>16</sup> writing blogs and attending our events.' However, you may find out about 'Groups' only if you are a member.<sup>17</sup> It listed an 'event', its Autumn Plenary on 15 November, but only Chairs could register for it (or Board members on their behalf).<sup>18</sup> Other resources include briefings, notes, consultations and other practical tools and information available to members but not published or in the public domain.

It is possible to glimpse the CUC's doings. Among the few 'alternative providers' whose Chairs are members of the CUC is the young Ravensbourne University London which offers taught undergraduate degrees in 'Industry, Innovation and Enterprise', but no research degrees.<sup>19</sup> The Minutes of its Board's meeting on 16 November 2022<sup>20</sup> include the detailed report of its own Chair, who had attended the CUC annual meeting the previous day 'with 50+ other university chairs'.

Matters raised at that CUC meeting, he explained, had included 'the current political backdrop to higher education'; the forthcoming budget statement, 'which had potential consequences for higher education funding'; a talk by Matt Western, Shadow Minister for Further Education and Skills, who had been enthusiastic about universities; concerns over inflation and financial pressures, both in running the university but also for students. There had also been a presentation by the government's Student Support Champion, Edward Peck, Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University; coverage of 'upcoming industrial action following the UCU vote'; the public perception of universities, with UUK/CUC research suggesting that universities in the news were characterised around culture wars and student debt; universities needing to consider how to manage growth. It is hard to see a reason why the CUC should keep this to its chest and publish no public account.

Its *Code of Governance* is the CUC's only significant fully open publication, dating from 2004, partly in response to recommendations in the Lambert Review of Business University Collaboration (December, 2003).<sup>21</sup> Oxford and Cambridge have to take notice of that. Compliance with it, as updated at intervals, became a HEFCE requirement, in connection with its allocation of public funding. HEFCE invited institutions which did not fully conform to 'comply or explain'. The *Code* has since been maintained as a requirement by the Office for Students which, as a 'Regulator' concentrates on 'compliance' in its *Regulatory Framework*. In that document 'comply' occurs 65 times and 'compliance' gets 143 mentions. To fall foul of HEFCE might have been expensive, though it almost never applied any sanction and only to extreme offenders. To displease the Office for Students could mean Deregistration, the loss of the right of its students to access student loans and worse. Yet exclusion from the CUC means Oxford and Cambridge cannot comply fully with the Office for Students' requirements for remaining on its Register. On a strict reading of the Office for Students' regulations failing to tell the OfS about a change in the identity of their Chairs is a 'reportable event'.<sup>22</sup>

Oxford and Cambridge have both chosen the grudgingly-allowed option of regularly justifying their own styles of governance when they publish their Annual Financial Statements. Oxford's current Governance statement does not mess about:

*'The University of Oxford is a lay corporation first established in common law and later formally incorporated by statute. It has no founder and no charter and is an independent and self-governing institution.'*<sup>23</sup>

It explains itself further in a *Table comparing the HE Code of Governance and the University's arrangements*, taking the firm if not defiant line that 'Oxford's governance reflects the general principles of the HE Code and

is consistent with most, although not all, of the specific guidelines'. It avoids expressly identifying the Council as its governing body, explaining that 'Council's decision is final unless Congregation exercises its power to intervene to oppose or amend that decision'. It is also elusive on 'representation of staff and students on governing body' explaining only about the participation of these categories in the work of the Council. Separation of 'the executive and governing body' is met by the fact that having 'Congregation as the sovereign body, ensures that broad oversight is provided in respect of all significant governing body decisions'. And since 'the University does not have a governing body consisting of a majority of external members', the 'clear separation of roles envisaged in the Code is not applicable'. In essence, 'the University's statutes and regulations 'maintain the separation of responsibilities'.

A *Code of Conduct* should ensure that members of the governing body abide by the principle of collective decision making. Oxford 'has no formal Code of Conduct' but its Statute VI makes 'provisions for the termination of membership'. Oxford's 'Council has not yet considered the appointment' of the 'Senior Independent Governor' the Code recommends. Council 'has no formal performance evaluation'. For its 'elected members, it is a matter for the electorate should they choose to stand for a second term'.<sup>24</sup> Cambridge's Council members are 'strongly encouraged to familiarise themselves with the following external guidance, including the CUC Code and their duties as charity trustees'.<sup>25</sup>

The CUC seems not to have the stomach to press any requirement that Oxford and Cambridge should get themselves independent Chairs for Congregation or the Regent House, leaving both defiantly in ultimate charge of their Universities' affairs.

<sup>1</sup>. *Amending Education Reform Act*, 1988 s.124 and Schedule 7A.

<sup>2</sup>. [https://media.frc.org.uk/documents/UK\\_Corporate\\_Governance\\_Code\\_2018.pdf](https://media.frc.org.uk/documents/UK_Corporate_Governance_Code_2018.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>. Oxford Statute II, Cambridge Statute B.

<sup>4</sup>. Statute VI.

<sup>5</sup>. Statute A,III,5.

<sup>6</sup>. Now merged with AdvanceHE, <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/>

<sup>7</sup>. [https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/lfb6/6921\\_insights\\_-\\_managing\\_relationshipsonline\\_1583330488.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/lfb6/6921_insights_-_managing_relationshipsonline_1583330488.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>. Martin Williams, 'Whospeaksforthe public interest in higher education?', HEPI Blog, 11 November, 2023, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/11/11/weekend-reading-who-speaks-for-the-public-interest-in-higher-education/>

<sup>9</sup>. [https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/governance/documents/media/register\\_of\\_interests\\_04\\_july\\_2023.pdf](https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/governance/documents/media/register_of_interests_04_july_2023.pdf) and <https://www.governance.cam.ac.uk/committees/council/Documentspublic/Summary%20of%20Council20DoIs%20for%20publication.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/2023/08/31/vice-chancellors-pay-response-to-hepi-debate-paper-33/>

<sup>11</sup>. AdvanceHE explains that he is: *responsible for the key documents that underpin the governance of all publicly funded UK HE institutions namely the CUC HE Code of Governance, the HE Senior Staff Remuneration Code, a range of illustrative practice notes e.g. Academic Assurance, Recruitment of VCs, etc and a Leadership Foundation publication on the relationship between Vice Chancellors and Chairs*, <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/person/john-rushforth>

<sup>12</sup>. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/2022/10/11/message-from-cuc-chair-michael-queen/>

<sup>13</sup>. [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk).

<sup>14</sup>. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/2022/04/06/top-tips-for-setting-up-a-successful-collaborative-group-an-interview-with-jane-hamilton/>

<sup>15</sup>. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/2023/09/28/cuc-autumn-news-letter-september-2023/>

<sup>16</sup>. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/membership/member-resources/connect-with-other-members/>

<sup>17</sup>. [www.universitychairs.ac.uk/membership/member-resources/groups/](http://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/membership/member-resources/groups/)

<sup>18</sup>. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/events/>

<sup>19</sup>. Fashion and Luxury Branding; Architecture and Interiors; Music and Sound; Graphics and Design; TV and Film; Animation and Illustration; Computing and Games; Marketing and Advertising; Digital Technology and Photography; Management and others, <https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/>

<sup>20</sup>. [https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/asset-bucket/prod/2023-05/Board\\_of\\_Governors\\_meeting\\_minutes\\_16\\_November\\_2022.pdf](https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/asset-bucket/prod/2023-05/Board_of_Governors_meeting_minutes_16_November_2022.pdf)

<sup>21</sup>. <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CUC-HE-Code-of-Governance-publication-final.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup>. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-16-reportable-events/>

<sup>23</sup>. [www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/Oxford%20University%20Financial%20Statements%202021-22.pdf](http://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/Oxford%20University%20Financial%20Statements%202021-22.pdf)

<sup>24</sup>. <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/table-comparing-the-he-code-of-governance-and-the-universitys-arrangements>

<sup>25</sup>. <https://www.governance.cam.ac.uk/committees/council/council-handbook/Pages/Duties-and-responsibilities.aspx>.

Sir – Neil Iden, (Letter to the Editor, *Oxford Magazine*, Fifth Week Michaelmas Term 2023), makes an interesting point about the decline in real terms of his pay over an eighteen-year period. He is clear about the data being used and that is very helpful. He calculates that his real pay has fallen by 43.603%. This exaggerates the effect for two reasons.

First, the difference between inflation and the percentage increase in income is a reasonable approximation for the reduction in real income when inflation is small but not when it is large. Real income is calculated by dividing income by the level of the price index. Suppose that income has risen by 50%, from 100 to 150. Meanwhile the price index has risen from 100 to 200, so there has been inflation of 100%. The difference between inflation and income growth is 50%, but this is not the reduction in real income. Initial real income was  $100/100 = 1$  and current real income is  $150/200 = 0.75$ , so real income has fallen by 25%. If instead prices have risen by 2% and income has risen by 1% the real pay reduction is 0.98% and its approximation using 1% is sensible. In Neil's case income growth was 51.866% and RPI (Retail Price Index) inflation was 95.469%, so current real income is  $151.866/195.469 = 0.77693$ . This implies a percentage reduction in real income of 22.3%.

## TO THE EDITOR

Second, the use of the growth in the RPI to represent inflation over this period is questionable. Growth in the RPI is no longer used by the Office for National Statistics and the Bank of England as the main measure of inflation. Growth in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is now the main measure. The Bank of England's inflation calculator gives the percentage increase in the CPI between 2004 (whole year) and May 2023 as 71.6%. Real

income measured this way is  $151.866/171.6 = 0.885$ , implying the reduction in real income has been 11.5%. The Bank of England inflation calculator does not provide monthly data for the CPI for 2005, while Neil's starting point is the RPI index for May 2005. Using the index for the full year before Neil's data starts is likely to mean that the estimate of 11.5% has a slight upward bias.

A reduction in pay in real terms of approximately 11.5% is substantial. The reduction in real income would be larger than 11.5% if expenditure is mostly on goods and services whose prices have risen by more than the index, which measures an average.

Yours sincerely  
SIMON COWAN  
*Exeter College*

## Not the Gazette

NB The Oxford Magazine is not an official publication of the University. It is a forum for the free expression of opinion within the University.

The *Oxford Magazine* is edited by

**Tim Horder  
&  
Ben Bollig**

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*Literary Editor:*  
**Jane Griffiths at Wadham**

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## “From the beginning of time until now”

*For M*

Article 1:

As I understand, the phrase exists in litigation  
To stop us from going back in time, to claim whatever  
We might think was wrongfully withheld.

Article 2:

But this morning I see things differently:  
Who can ever imagine the beginning of time,  
Even between two people who just met

Article 3:

And set the clock in motion for their  
Hopes together? “Now” is the relevant  
Word now, because the clock has stopped

Article 4:

Where we are: in a room with documents  
Where the only other words that matter  
In the dissolution of the marriage are

Article 5:

“Affirmatively asserts”. Well, I assert  
I own no worldly things, though I will  
Do so not “affirmatively”. Let us talk

Article 6:

About heavenly possessions then:  
Hopes, feelings, dreams? From the time  
I can remember, I had them and lost them.

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## West River Drive

*For my mother*

The priest painted Dad’s room on Sunday,  
One month and two days after he died,  
And he became an imagined presence.

In my mind’s eye I bend towards his pillow  
To kiss his forehead, I try to hold his gaze,  
But memory is a misleading path.

You threw away his bed, the curtains;  
I took his black suit in his carry-on suitcase;  
Loredana drove all his tools to her house.

Dad’s garage is dismantled,  
Our pictures are in boxes,  
And you prepare to sell the house.

What will happen to your dahlias,  
The gladioli and the tiger lilies,  
That feeling of coming home to find you?

Two days ago, a bald eagle danced above  
My rented house. Grief finds us  
In one place and takes us to another.

I want to know where you are going,  
Because I want to come with you.  
Let us travel together for a while.

CARMEN BUGAN

Carmen Bugan’s new and selected poems, *Lilies from America*, was published in 2019; her most recent book of poetry is *Time Being* (2022). She is also the author of the memoir *Burying the Typewriter: Childhood Under the Eye of the Secret Police* and a book of essays on politics and poetics, *Poetry and the Language of Oppression* (OUP, 2021). Carmen Bugan teaches literature and creative writing at New York University Abu Dhabi.

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## Porcelain cups

*For my mother*

Our set of espresso cups  
With light pink roses  
Painted in a garden setting  
Contained by borders of gold,  
Has travelled softly and unharmed  
Across the ocean, and from there  
In suitcases and in boxes  
Once again.

But these days, I am so tense,  
Everything I hold in my hands  
Cracks: there is only one  
Crystal champagne flute left. I saved  
The coffee cups, now filled with  
Tiny cracks – like dead-end paths  
Through fissured rose gardens –  
Into nests of tissue paper.  
I stored them in the cupboard  
Until my hands learn not  
To hold the dearest things too tight.

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